
THE BOOK OF GENEZIS AS FOUNDATION FOR THE EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION'S CONCEPT OF SOCIAL HELP

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Abstract

Pointing out the three related factors that determine the basis of European understanding of social assistance, the article situates this topic in the context of the Book of Genesis as the starting point of the Judaist-Christian perception of human being. First of all, this Biblical basis is constitutive to our understanding of the nature of human dignity, the definition of which cannot be (in the European context) separated from the anthropological understanding that is derived from the image of human being as found in the book of Genesis. Ensuing is the concept of non-judgment, which is the first step in the effort of social assistance to another person, where the inner attitude is to see the problem of another person in the context of a possibility of correction or the achievement of a desirable state that corresponds at least to the basic features of the given social norm. Finally, the article analyses the notion of sociality and the pursuit of its application in relation to another person as a clear, positive step of concrete recovery of a person who finds himself in a situation that does not correspond to his dignity.

Keywords: human, dignity, non-judgment, sociability, social assistance

1. Introduction

This article assumes the perspective that the European culture has been determined by three identifiers: (1) Ancient Greek philosophy, (2) Roman law and (3) Christian religion, building on its Judaic foundations. These three have not always worked together smoothly, yet the European civilization had after long centuries of struggle, growth, and innovation attained a solid measure of stability, including cultural and ethical cohesiveness. In our study, we have chosen the topic of the essentials of social assistance from the perspective of biblical position based on the core values found in the Book of Genesis. This theme is picked up for an in-depth discussion in terms of the third identifier.

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At the same time, we will always have in mind two lines that have been suggested by the great authors of our time. We will keep in mind the ideas of Michael Sandel, a professor of Harvard University, who speaks about today's society in a fairly incisive way when he says that we have deviated from the market economy and instead become a market-based society. This market society is characterized by the fact that it is already a way of life in which the values of the market penetrate into all aspects of human activity and that almost everything is more or less for sale [1]. Important determinants in our reasoning will also be the arguments of John Lennox, a professor at Oxford University, who is attempting to respond to contemporary, widespread technical thinking about the world, as if our world was determined only by the forces of Physics and genetic self-development. In his famous debate with Richard Dawkins, Lennox argues that we can be moral people without God in what concerns our personal deeds, but he is not convinced that we can find the basis of the idea of what it means to be a moral human being without God [J. Lennox, *Richard Dawkins vs John Lennox/The God Delusion Debate*, October 3, 2007, University of Alabama, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF5bPI92-5o>]. Secular morality without God – such was the project of the Enlightenment but after two world wars and a dark history of gulags and other human atrocities in our industrial and post-industrial age, it becomes obvious that such 'God-less' project is untenable. This problem has its roots in the unwarranted presupposition of the Enlightenment intellectuals: "The underlying characteristic of Enlightenment is an uncritical faith in the objectivity of human reason - in the capacity of reason (a metaphysical, transpersonal category) to explain the world and to teach the human race how to live in it" [2]. The post-Enlightenment interpreters of reality thus "cannot resist the urge to rationalize" everything, even their own Christian belief, as Valčo rightly points out [2]. We wish to liberate ourselves from this secularist, immanent perspective in order to offer a more solid basis for human dignity and interpersonal interactions. In this article, therefore, God is considered as the basis of the whole anthropological and metaethical angle of view [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF5bPI92-5o>]. We follow here Ambrozy's line of reasoning, claiming that: "Religious answers show that reality cannot be judged only by our senses. Without religious questions, there would be no transcendental questions going beyond the measurable that can be perceived empirically." [3]

Our reflections regarding the foundational aspects of social assistance will be based on such understanding. At the same time, we will concentrate on what we believe to be three main issues underlying the European perception of social assistance: human dignity, the idea of non-judgment and the expression of respect for the dignity of human being, and their sociability. A fundamental feature of the European culture is its specific definition of human dignity, as it was continually defined by the historical evolution of European realities and thinking. Its root can be traced through the prism of religion in biblical texts. This understanding also determined the context of grasping human dignity in the first generation of documents related to human rights. According to this

perspective, human dignity is relationally defined through the relationship of God to the individual human person. This emphasis on the relational nature of human identity corresponds not only to the aforementioned determinants but also to current sociological understanding of how human identity is constituted. "Human identity is constituted dialogically, through communication. One's self-perception hence depends on how the individual is perceived by others around him" in an on-going interpersonal communication [4].

The dignity of human being found in the book of Genesis and/or inferred from its texts is the basis for defining the attitudes and actions of God and humans, which we call by the term 'non-judgment'. This is the foundational step that presupposes and anticipates later social action. At the same time, we can say that based on such understanding of the dignity of human being, and the absence of judging his/her actions right from the first moment, we go to the positive act, which is the manifestation of sociability and the action we call social assistance. Furthermore, if social assistance is to be reflected at scientific level in the form of a scientific discipline such as social work, it cannot be done without a thorough analysis of the sources upon which it is to be established. In our study, we have attempted to conduct an in-depth analysis of the foundations for understanding social assistance and the position of human being in the context of understanding this issue in our European civilizational space.

2. Dignity of human being based on the biblical account of Creation

If we are to contemplate the selected biblical references in the Book of Genesis, which contain recommendations and commands related to social assistance, we cannot begin with anything other than the view of human dignity, which is the starting point of all the commands and recommendations that are comprised therein.

The Book of Genesis brings two reports of the creation of humans. The older, so-called 'Jahvistic', found in the second chapter, begins with these words: "*These are the generations of the heavens and of the Earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the Earth and the heavens. And every plant of the field before it was in the Earth, and every herb of the field before it grew ... and there was not a man ... And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" (Genesis 2.4-7) According to this report, the uniqueness of man consists in the fact that, he is created as the first and privileged creation. The following verses reveal his name, 'Adam'. The term 'Adam' does not mean his own name, but human being in general, the human race of which he is a member. As a result, all members of the human race are in a privileged position with special human dignity. Until the creation of man, all other creatures are created around and in the relationship to man. "*We have already understood man in the Old Testament as still in relation to the other beings whose existence is based on relatedness and on its particular forms of relationships,*" [5] as Dietrich rightly observes.

Dignity and individuality in the context of this superiority or uniqueness rests in the fact that man is the one who names others, understands their essence and correctly judges. ‘Non-human’ creature is not a partner to him, so God gives him a companion and Adam will recognize her and her equivalence (equal standing) with him. Her being created from a part of his body indicates that she shares same dignity and essence with Adam. According to this report, the human being is a privileged and social creature that is connected with the Earth and at the same time is a spiritual being. Their identity is relational – materially they are related to and conditioned by the rest of the material creation (including the soil of the Earth), while personally and spiritually they are related to the One who willingly entered into a relationship with, speaking their name and bidding them to respond in trust and love as free agents. Also important in the Genesis accounts of creation (in both, chapters one and two) is the fact that “God created everything out of nothing (Genesis 1.1). That means that in comparison with the Being of the one true God, everything else that was created is contingent. Everything depends for its existence on God. This is the ontological line that must be drawn – not between mind and matter, or visible and invisible, but between Creator and creation. The doctrines of the Trinity and of creation out of nothing help in understanding the continuity of creation and its redemption by the death and resurrection of Christ and the eschatological coming of God’s kingdom.” [6]

The younger report is the so-called ‘Elohistic’ one, which is included in the text of Genesis in the first place. In this report, man is the last of God’s creations. God first creates light, Cosmos, plant and living creatures, and ultimately forms man from the dust of the Earth. One may see here a principle of gradual growth of complexity and glory of God’s creation, where the human person is at the top. There are more facts about the dignity of man. The first is that only in the case of man there is an audible speech of the Creator: “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*” (Genesis 1.26a). We might label it a speech of intentional deliberation, as if God had been deciding in a secret counsel about his next work of creation. For all other creatures, the command is implied as present in God’s mind and will to create but no deliberation is indicated to have taken place. The second fact is that man is made in the image of God as the biblical text of the book of Genesis literally says: “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them*” (Genesis 1.27). God thus makes human being (as a species) as a man and a woman, these two being equal in dignity, neither one nor the other possessing the greater and/or lesser quantity of dignity. They are fully equal.

The responsibility entrusted to man is described in the verses of Genesis 1.26 and Genesis 1.28, which include the need for a rational, emotional and spiritual manifestation, because God entrusts to him the care of the Earth. The situation of the first human being is thus not characterized by a kind of fatality, nor by some arbitrary liberty. On the contrary, his is the mission to govern and to

care for the rest of divine creation, by virtue of free decision-making, willingly assuming responsibility, setting an ever-new goal and achieving it.

Both accounts of creation in Genesis present man as a unique and autonomous being with a special status and mission beyond comparison with any other creature on Earth. His dignity and value were established ontologically and relationally in the creative act of God and subsequently in God's direct addressing the first humans and giving them a special status by making humans his partners within the *creatio continua* (God's continuing works of creation and preservation of the world) [7].

These texts can be considered a foundational starting point for the subsequent attempts to delineate the view of human dignity in the understanding of Israel and in the context of the Judaist-Christian tradition of later transfer of such understanding into the intellectual milieu of the European civilization. We may speak here of the so-called 'spiritual inculturation', as Slivka argues in his recent study on this topic: "*The term '[spiritual] inculturation' refers to the process by which the message of the Bible roots itself in the cultural environment where it penetrates. In this process, the shared values of the given culture are perceived as universal values that stem from faith in God.*" [8]

The Hebrew tradition, and later Christian intellectual heritage that permeated much of the European thought, point to the creation of humans by God when dealing with the concept of human dignity. There begins the doctrine of the dignity of human being, his worth, his social status, etc. Jewish as well as Christian anthropological premises stem from this notion of humans being intentionally created in the image of God. This understanding was also the basis for defining the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "*all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*" [*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>]. Needless to say, the nature and content of human dignity continue to be debated among scholars, intellectuals and politicians until this day.

There is a whole range of views when it comes to the basic question of Anthropology: 'What is a human being?'. No matter how we approach this foundational question, the categories we know from Aristotle's time seem to continue to hold their relevance for us today. One of them is the category of relation. Human individual as such is aware of himself and recognizes himself in a different way from other objects and beings, perceiving his own uniqueness, value, as well as limitations. If we use this category which helps us to know something or somebody, it enables us to perceive it in *relation* to something and someone. Yet, if we think about human dignity, we think about something that is common to all people. This problem is accentuated (among others) by Marcus Düwell who presents it as one of the problematic points of the Universal Declaration's statement on human dignity, saying: "*From the construction of the full-scope concept of human dignity, it will be expected to clarify at least the following issues ... (b) Such a concept will have to be able to state or to define who is the holder of dignity and who is not...*" [9] However, if we define who is

and who is not to be the holder of dignity, we would define two categories of people, one of which would be automatically inferior. Human history provides ample evidence of what happens when humans take on this responsibility, daring to categorize people based on their supposed level of dignity. The voices of millions of victims of Nazism, Communism, and similar ideologies constitute a sobering warning. From our point of view, therefore, any intellectual speculation regarding who should, or should not be the holder of dignity (or to what extent it should be ascribed to him) is unacceptable. “*Fading values and their need for re-entry into the life of a person existing in this post-modern era bring new challenges in terms of searching for truth*”, as we could see it in numerous human ideologies and desperate attempts to ground the value of the human on anything else but the loving act of the Creator [10, p. 73].

Once we firmly establish that human dignity belongs to everyone in equal measure, we can further make further intellectual enquiries into the problem of ‘relation’. What kind of relation are we talking about with reference to the common dignity of all people? If we wish to define something, that is, determine its nature and value, in relation to what should we do it so that it would be valid for all people universally?

The Bible contains the deepest justification for human dignity, because the dignity of humans does not depend upon them, their abilities, or anything else, but on God who infinitely surpasses humans. Due to His infinite perfection in all attributes, God is the Guarantor of dignity, because the human was created by God according to His image. “*The human being represents a unique and unrepeatable individual being, yet at the same time very one who is entangled with other persons. He is a social creature and without an interpersonal relationship he cannot live or develop his abilities.*” [11] This understanding of the foundation of human dignity helps us discover and identify not only our own dignity but we also become able to justify the dignity of other people, even those to whom social assistance is directed. It has a significant impact on the work of personnel in the field of social assistance. Last but not least, such biblical perspective impacts one’s personal life, attitudes toward life, as well as the values that govern him. This can be confirmed by the statements we find in a recent study on theological anthropology, according to which “Anthropology rooted in Christology ... means that the human individual was created as a dignified and, to some extent, ‘autonomous’ partner of God in the ongoing drama of *creatio continua*, which overlaps with salvation history. ... *Imago Dei*, as an unmerited gift of fellowship with God”, enables the human individual to engage in the ‘*Imitatio Dei*’, which in turn “effects a fuller actualization of the *Imago Dei*” in our interactions with other humans – also created with the same dignity as is ours [12].

3. The idea of non-judgment and the expression of respect for the dignity of human being

In providing social assistance, especially in the context of tertiary prevention, it is necessary to draw attention to and emphasize the principle of non-judgment. Tertiary prevention pertains those individuals who have already had or developed social dysfunctions. In the context of our analysis of biblical texts, this idea is already on the first pages of the Book of Genesis, although not in the form of an explicit definition. We first analyse the texts that relate to God's action towards man.

God forbids the man to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, when he says, "*Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*" (Genesis 2.16-17) Thus man is in imminent danger of death on the same day. "*This verse is a direct warning that 'death' occurs after eating.*" [13] Despite the fact that man violates God's forbidding command, nothing happens. His punishment is not lethal, at least not at the very moment of transgression. From a theological point of view, however, God removes the immortality from the first humans and thus also from the human race as such. What follows after the observation that man had now become 'one of us', comes to us as a surprise. God gives man another chance as if He 'had forgotten' His promise of a 'death sentence'. The Book of Genesis portrays the punishment (which entails spiritual death) as being driven from Paradise. "*Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken ...*" (Genesis 3.23)

The idea of non-judgment is the basis of our contemporary approach to those individuals who have committed evil. The concept of restorative justice, which emphasizes the element of renewal, is today the most preferred model of attitude towards a person who fails, or even towards his/her victim or victims. Halye gives a rather precise definition when he says that restorative justice is the process by which a committed perpetrator accepts responsibility for his evil conduct, or behaviour towards the injured and the community, whose response is to enable the offender to reintegrate into society. Emphasis is placed on restoration that is restoring the perpetrator in terms of his self-esteem, restoring the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, as well as restoring the relationship between both the perpetrator and the victim within the community [14]. All of today's understanding of social assistance in any segment of its delivery is determined precisely by such understanding of the approach to human being.

If we analyse other parts of the Book of Genesis, we find there the idea of non-judgment and the notion of restorative justice, not only in the context of the act of aid itself, but we also find a much deeper understanding of the above-mentioned attitude, its substantial justification. God expels man, but he also shows his attitude of mercy even by not casting the man out of Heaven in his naked state (a reference to the human attempts to mask his nudity only with

leaves), but rather giving Adam and Eve dignified clothing. “*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*” (Genesis 3.21)

A clothed human individual, either in a direct or metaphorical way, is the basic starting point of social assistance as it is perceived by our civilization and beyond. Clothing a human person can be perceived from the point of view of charity, when we actually offer clean clothes to such individual, but there is much more going on than might appear on surface. What resonates even more in the needy person is the fact we are returning him his dignity. We help him to cleanse himself from false allegations, allow him to die in a dignified way in the environment of a hospice or palliative care; we will not let him die without providing assistance, we condemn any form of enslavement that attacks directly the dignity of the human individual and we try to punish the culprit, and so on. This act of clothing in the biblical context means that “*when God puts clothing on them, they no longer need to be ashamed, either before Him or before themselves; the allegory of God’s forgiveness is behind this*” [13, p. 166].

The Book of Genesis brings another insight into the notion of non-judgement in the story of Cain and Abel, which is a fitting expression of God’s attitude in this respect. Though the voice of the blood of the slain brother calls to God, and despite the fact that God strictly condemns Cain’s deed, God takes into consideration Cain’s fear of being killed and his implied repentance, and gives him another chance. “*And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.*” (Genesis 4.15)

Another relatively cogent moment that the Book of Genesis brings in the context of the idea of non-judgement is the story of the world’s flood. After the flood in which all unjust perish, nobody but the righteous Noah with his family remain on Earth. After the end of the flood and the sacrifice he brings, God solemnly promises: “*I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done. While the Earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease ...*” (Genesis 8.21-22)

The idea of non-judgement is also found in other parts of the first book of the Bible. Abraham pleads for God to save Sodom and God, for the sake of several righteous, will forgive the whole city. “*...I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake. And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.*” (Genesis 18.32-33)

The notion of non-judgement can be found not only in the relationship of God to man, but also in human interpersonal relationships. This idea is found in the relationship between the two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Even after Jacob stole Isaac’s blessing for himself and the ensuing brothers’ quarrel, they eventually come to be reconciled (Genesis 33). Similarly, Joseph, who had experienced the abandonment of his brothers when they sold him as a slave to

Egypt, finally reveals his identity and forgives his brothers, even though it was in his power to condemn them (Genesis 37-45).

Part of the notion of non-judgement is the acceptance of the value of a person living in today's world, knowing that the dignity of this human individual is independent of the quality of his life, thought, expression, and the like. Such respect for the other and his dignity is deeply rooted in our civilization. Determinants for this should be looked for particularly in the context of the Bible. The first example of emphasizing the dignity of a human individual by another human can be found in the Genesis' account of Noah's failure. "*Noah ... planted and vineyard. And he drank the wine, and was drunken; And he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham ... saw the nakedness of his father ... And Shem and Japheth took a garment ... and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father.*" (Genesis 9.20-23) Although his two sons were aware of their father's failure, they did not leave him in a disgraceful way, but they showed respect for his dignity as one who was created in God's image. They cover the nakedness of their father, thus imitating what God had done when he expelled humans from paradise while preserving their dignity by clothing them.

Another expression that cannot be ignored is the expression Hittites' sympathy with Abraham's sadness after the death of his wife Sarah. Although Abraham finally acquires a burial place by purchasing it from the Hittites, their reaction represents a profound expression of respect for the dignity of the deceased human being and her family. They offer him a completely untouched place for the grave. "*And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord ... in the choice of our sepulchers bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulcher, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.*" (Genesis 23.5-6)

4. Sociability

In the context of the idea we have defined in the introduction and which has developed from the dignity of every human being through the idea of non-judgement, we have come to the concept of sociability. Sociability, as perceived by most authors, is defined as a propensity to pro-social behaviour, a profound sense of the importance of community and communal living, wherein the needs of other persons are emphasized. There are, of course, positive and negative connotations associated with this concept.

Patočka argues that human sociality means that we are not alone, that our coexistence in the world is political and that in the world of people this means to be with others [15]. The context of sociability associated with politics is also found in Ruda, who reminds us that being social and political are not general concepts, but that they are in fact identical, because universal human sociality finds its most rational and highest form of implementation in the community [16].

Among numerous authors who speak of social humanity in the positive sense, we also find authors who point out the negatives associated with the sociality of human individuals in the community. Taylor et al. issues a sobering warning that social support from others, even though it may be intended to be good, may have a negative impact on those whom it is supposed to help. Sociability does not always have to be good [17]. Hausser et al. corrected the term 'social' in some way when he attempted to recover its original positive meaning by claiming that the negative effect of sociability might be felt by an individual who does not belong to the same social group, even though the group expected the same level of integration [18]. The phenomenon of sociability thus remains disputed. Nevertheless, its potential is clearly recognizable and acknowledged across of a wide spectrum of researchers and social scientists.

The notion of sociability in the sense of 'sociality' that best serves the purposes of our work is presented by Janowski [19]. Connecting the term sociality with Old Testament theology, Janowski claims that the sociality of a human being, i.e. their involvement and/or entering into social ties and roles is a basic indicator of Old Testament anthropology. The human person is hence seen as 'constellative', that is, being incorporated into the community. The term 'constellation' here brings a comprehensive expression of humanity in relation to God, to another person, to animals, to the world, and vice versa. Notion of this constitutive relatedness "*wants to see the beginning of philosophical searching in the interpersonal dialogue and dialogue with God which simply cannot be left out of the human self*" [20].

We find the primary form of sociability in God's expression found in the book of Genesis where God said, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*" (Genesis 1.26). This verse kept resurfacing as a topic of discussion quite often in history and, therefore, it is a verse that encouraged many interpretations. The use of the plural is most logically relevant to two possible interpretations, which are also consistent with Hebrew monotheism. In the first place, the plural number refers to God and angels; in the second, the plural is a certain form of self-realization. We can thus argue that this announcement or challenge can be perceived in terms of the modality of the message to heavenly powers to draw attention to the ultimate work of creation, which is man. The Christian hermeneutical perspective, naturally, leans to interpreting the text in a Trinitarian fashion, where Christ is also active with the Father. It should be added, however, that this view is being isolated today, because the biblical author himself did not perceive God in this way [13, p. 72-73]. Nevertheless, as the context of our reasoning obliges us to think, it cannot be overlooked that the dialogue of God, whether with the heavenly court or within the Trinitarian life of the Godhead, is the first sign of sociality, a sense of community where individual lives of humans are connected both with God and other humans. Sociability manifests itself in the creation of the human as man and woman. "*The doctrine of the creation of man and woman clearly indicates that man and woman were together with the intent of being one for another but not in the sense that God made them only 'half-naked' as 'incomplete'. Creation of a man and woman was*

done so to focus on the good of communities in which everyone can be 'help' for others because they are equal and complementary.” [21]

Another biblical text implicitly expressing sociality is found in the following verse: *“And God blessed them, and God said unto them: Be fruitful ...”* as well as the following verse *“And God said, Behold, I have given you ...”* (Genesis 1.28, 29). The words of God are directed towards the first humans. From this it can be deduced that besides drawing attention to the task of reproduction and subsistence of human beings, also lifted up is the gift and task of communication. What we find in Genesis 1.28-29 is the very foundation for a personal relationship of God and man, which corresponds to personal communication as well as giving humans the right to rule. So, in the context of sociality, man becomes a partner of God.

In both verses, at the same time, God sets man in an environment that is tied to sociality. We find it in two texts. The first is *“...and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the Earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the Earth”* (Genesis 1.26) and the second is *“...Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the Earth”* (Genesis 1.28). The second text gives a view of the human being – as man and woman in their social connectedness and complementarity. Human being is the summit of creation in the world with God's authority to rule or, as is emphasized in oriental (i.e. eastern ecclesial) understanding, to manage, protect and care for themselves. Humans are thus authorized to enter into relationships and act as social beings in the context of being sensitive to the needs of the community. Here we share the view of Dietrich, who says that the Old Testament man is not a simple part of a collective personality, as was postulated by the Old Testament research for a long period of time, nor is he an individual being in a modern sense that ought to be aware of his present uniqueness, manifesting it externally, but he is a relational being that wants and needs to be understood in his relations in a variety of historical and cultural portrayals. Social anthropology of the Old Testament explores on this basis the Old Testament man as a relational being and within his relationship structures [5].

In the so-called Yahweh's creation report, we find a direct reference to the need for human assistance that God Himself expresses. *“And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.’”* (Genesis 2.18) This statement points out the acute human need for community and relationships, these belonging to the essence of human life. The need for an appropriate help is anticipated here, as well as the fact that a single person in and of himself/herself is not self-sufficient. God then brings animals before man, and man names them, which can be perceived in the context of the acquisition of authority over them, but also as a penetration into the essence of named beings. In spite of the expectation that a suitable companion would be found, the end of the verse from Genesis 2.20 states: *“... but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him”*. God solves man's need for a real communion by

creating a woman whom He then brings before man. The subsequent expression of man in verse Genesis 2:23, which contains a number of elements of Hebrew poetry, testifies to his complete satisfaction. Equally important is the fact that the very first words of man convey his joy (are praise words, celebratory in nature), while also expressing the essential equivalence of man and woman. It can also be said that the identity of a man is determined in a relationship to the identity of a woman. Although different from man, the woman is equivalent to him, having essentially the same value and dignity. She attracts the man and causes him to rejoice. The initial sociality, the primary sense of community, is thus imprinted inside the human being in the context of the creation of man and woman [13, p. 142-143]. *“By means of an existential examination man seeks in himself a God with whom to establish a relationship and dialogue. Human beings, then, in their deepest, spiritual sense, mean both relationship and dialogue. However, the connection with God does not mean self-sacrifice but rather an enrichment and a challenge for creative activity in accordance with our free will.”* [22]

In addition to these texts, we find the expression of sociality, i.e. the sense for community or human needs, also in Abraham’s meeting with the three men he saw standing at his tent. We should keep in mind that this event takes place during an extremely hot and dry season. Abraham is aware of the time of the day, clearly seeing that the travellers need to rest. There remains a tradition of having a rest during the hottest part of the day, especially in the Mediterranean countries, until this day. Abraham literally hurries to show them respect by bowing to them, offering them water to wash themselves, inviting them to rest in the shade of trees, and offering them food. *“The offer of water and bread was a basic expression of hospitality to foreigners.”* [13, p. 429] This hospitality is emphasized by Abraham’s respectful attitude as well as by the fact that he himself serves the guests, yet he does not eat with them, but stands on the side watching them eat. Hospitality is an integral part of sociability. It is not just a simple satisfaction of one’s physical needs, or inviting somebody in and providing help; it is a beginning of an interpersonal contact and dialogue. We may fully agree with Meir [23], who says that the whole course of Abraham’s meeting with the three guests and the way he showed his hospitality witness to the unique ability of each human being – the ability to be open to others, to share oneself with others. While other creatures in nature fight with each other for survival, people are uniquely able to get in touch with others and show them help without losing themselves. Abraham’s example is in itself paradigmatic for the acceptance of others because his identity lies in the acceptance of others.

5. Conclusions

A solid understanding of the basic problems presented by us is almost a necessity for achieving an adequate level of social assistance and, in a wider context, for the whole range of social work, including counselling in our civilizational space. When we talk about this conditional ‘necessity’ (qualifying it with the word ‘almost’), we mean that it is also possible to provide social

assistance either on a contractual basis or so to speak automatically. However, if we are unwilling to give up on a higher ideal of preparing real and mature experts in the area we are exploring, it is impossible to avoid critically reflecting on the above facts. Finally, the practice in the fields of higher education for students of social work, social services and counselling includes not only theoretically and practically oriented subjects, but also other courses that by their nature aim to direct our thinking to the essential facts that determine our overall approach, as well as to a fundamental understanding of the human approach to social assistance.

In our study, we have attempted to present the essence of our civilizationally-conditioned understanding of social help, based on selected parts of the biblical texts that constitute the foundation of one of the three great determinants – the Judeo-Christian source of our civilization. We have introduced in logical sequence three essential facts that influence our thinking about the human being in the context of the criterion of social assistance. Without an adequate understanding of human dignity (including its constitutive foundation), which always reflects the image of a human person as understood by a specific human civilization, it is impossible to provide the kind of social assistance that has the spirit and that determines the provision of assistance as an act of human selfless service, which is a part of mission – mission that not only transfers work performance but in some way also imparts one human being to another. The analysed biblical texts along with corresponding secondary literature move us to conclude that the Judeo-Christian view seems to us to be the only solid foundation for human dignity, reflecting its deepest understanding in the context of the European civilization. Human dignity, as we have presented here, then becomes the point of departure for the idea of non-judgement. Not to make a judgement of a human person whose life, actions, or sometimes his very survival appeals the people around or the society in which he/she is situated, is only possible when viewed from the perspective of a deep understanding of the value of humanity as such. Avoiding the initial judgment of a given human being means to take the first step towards his/her acceptance while being fully aware of his/her imperfection, weakness, problem, or propensity to be manipulative [24].

From this first step, then, in the context of sociability, one can gradually begin to rebuild one's life: from receiving some basic, necessary help, on to the ability of self-help, in which one begins to discover oneself with his abilities and human uniqueness, until one has been integrated into a humanly dignified and fulfilling life. We believe that a solid understanding of the foundation and nature of human dignity – based on the constitutive texts of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the intellectual and cultural experience of the European civilization – can provide us with sufficient orientation when facing the complex challenges in the area of social assistance. It enables social service providers (in all helping professions) to view their service as a mission with a noble purpose, thus cultivating in them a potent inner motivation that cannot be cultivated by other types of incentives.

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